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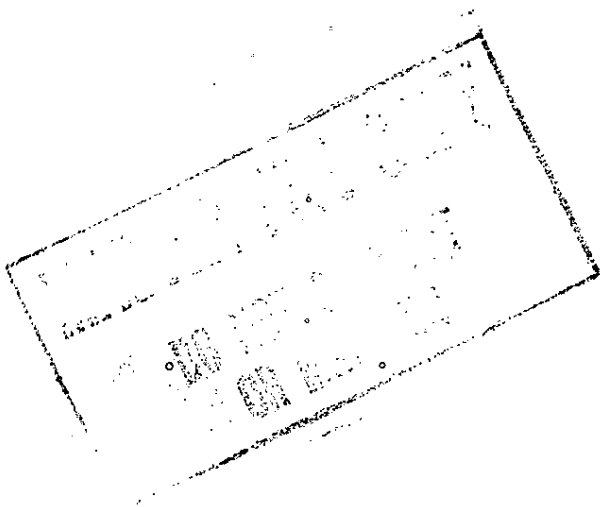
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# India: Congress Party in Flux



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An Intelligence Assessment



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NESA 84-10113  
March 1984

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# India: Congress Party in Flux

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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This paper was prepared by [Redacted] of the  
Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis  
with a contribution from [Redacted] of the  
Office of Central Reference. It was coordinated with  
the Directorate of Operations [Redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
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*NESA 84-10113  
March 1984*

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**India:  
Congress Party in Flux**

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**Key Judgments***Information available  
as of 15 March 1984  
was used in this report.*

The Congress Party under Prime Minister Gandhi's personal leadership has deteriorated since her return to power in 1980 and may fragment in future elections. Despite its weakened state, the Congress remains the single largest political organization in India and is likely to retain power on the strength of Gandhi's personal popularity unless the now-disparate opposition can form a united front.

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In our judgment, Gandhi's efforts since her return to power in 1980 to transform the party into an instrument of personal power have:

- Atrophied the party organization and undermined its ability to govern.
- Eroded its popular support.
- Stimulated moves by the fragmented opposition parties to unite against Gandhi's Congress Party.
- Encouraged destabilizing regional movements and heightened caste and religious tensions.
- Contributed to foreign policy stances that have strained India's relations with neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, and strengthened New Delhi's ties with Moscow in the near term.

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We believe Gandhi's centralization of party and government leadership in her own hands reflects in part her determination to deflect challenges while she ensures the succession of her son Rajiv. To this end, she has removed dissenters from the party, declared herself party president, clipped the wings of state Congress Party leaders, and retained direct control of key government functions. We judge she has for the short run successfully cleared the field of rivals within the party, but Rajiv has yet to demonstrate the mettle he would require to win such leadership if Gandhi died or lost power before effecting his succession.

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Although we believe India's near-term political stability is secure, Gandhi's personalized style of rule has sapped the vigor of her party; undermined its state governments; and devitalized Parliament, the court system, and the bureaucracy—key institutions of long-term national stability. Weak Congress state governments appointed and directed from New Delhi have been unable to curb factionalism, contain dissidence, or administer effectively. The government's quick resort to repression in the face of unrest has loosened historic ties between the party and minorities, eroding its electoral base and fueling regional, caste, and religious conflict. Unless Gandhi or her successor devolves some power to state units of the party and rebuilds its grassroots organization, the Congress Party could lose dominance in the coming years.

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We judge that the Congress Party is on the defensive in this national election year. Poor showings in state and local elections held since the last national contest in 1980 have exposed the party's organizational weaknesses. The party's apparent vulnerability has spurred efforts by opposition parties to unite before the elections, which must be held before next February. Prospects for a durable coalition remain problematic. Despite the possibility of imminent national elections, opposition leaders continue to spar among themselves. Some have even considered joining Gandhi. [REDACTED]

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Gandhi's political liabilities have led her to seek foreign as well as domestic scapegoats, to the detriment of India's foreign relations. In our view, Gandhi's hostile stance toward neighboring countries reflects prelection political pressures at home as well as enduring foreign policy concerns—such as fears that the US-Pakistani security relationship threatens India. Gandhi's harsh rhetoric has soured India's relations in the region and undercut earlier efforts to balance close ties with Moscow by improving relations with regional states and the United States. We judge these developments have provided new opportunities for Moscow's efforts to discredit the United States and Pakistan and are likely in the short term to ensure closer Indo-Soviet ties at some expense to ties with Washington.

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**India:  
Congress Party in Flux****Strong Dynastic Leadership**

Returned to power in 1980 after a three-year hiatus on the strength of Prime Minister Gandhi's personal popularity, the Congress Party has become virtually a one-woman organization. Although the party remains the most powerful and the largest in the nation—with a membership estimated by Indian press analysts at 15 million—we judge that Gandhi has secured her dominance at some cost to the party's ability to govern effectively and mobilize votes. According to Indian public opinion polls, Gandhi's personal popularity remains high, but we believe the Congress Party—for over 30 years the backbone of stability and of democratic and secular values in the Indian political system—faces the national election to be held before next February without the vitality that hitherto ensured its dominance.

We believe Gandhi viewed her victory in 1980 as a mandate to emphasize the strong personal leadership that characterized her previous 11 years as Prime Minister. In an apparent effort to preclude challenges to her authority and her son Rajiv's succession, she has avoided delegating much authority in government or party. As head of the party that controls about two-thirds of the seats in Parliament and 16 of the 22 state governments, Gandhi dominates party affairs, controls appointments of national and state party officials, and formulates domestic and foreign policy almost singlehandedly.

As a result, virtually every important issue gravitates to New Delhi.

Gandhi's unchallenged control of the Congress Party, in our view, enhances the likelihood that she will be able to transfer the party leadership to her son Rajiv—providing she is still in power to do so. US diplomats and Indian commentators assess that Rajiv still lacks the political acumen and popularity among old guard party officials to secure the Congress leadership on his own merits. Although Rajiv is nominally but one of five party general secretaries, Gandhi has positioned him to take over sometime

after the national election that must be held by next February, according to Embassy reports. Both Gandhi's supporters and detractors have discounted her public denials of any dynastic intent. President Zail Singh—elected for a five-year term in 1982—is personally loyal to the Nehru family and favors the continuation of the Gandhi dynasty, according to Indian media sources.

**Costs of Gandhi's Leadership: Institutional Decay**

In our view, Gandhi's overbearing rule has debilitated her party and eroded other vital institutions. Gandhi's critics assert that, although she has stopped short of breaching her constitutional authority as she did during the two-year Emergency she declared in 1975, her policies and leadership style have eroded the autonomy and legitimacy of Parliament and the court system as well as the Congress Party organization and bureaucracy. According to Embassy and Indian press reports, Gandhi's dismissive attitude toward Parliament and her party's manipulation of parliamentary proceedings have undermined the national legislature's intended role as a check to executive power and its public standing as well. At the same time, the autonomous judiciary is under pressure to support government policy, further narrowing the institutional base from which future governments will have to cope with change and manage unrest.

In our judgment, the Congress Party under Gandhi has lost some of the capabilities that have made it a vital source of stability since independence. According to US scholars, the Congress machine until the early 1970s was uniquely able to accommodate diverse constituencies and provide opportunities for competing political elites. Gandhi's policy of purging dissenters from the party has diminished the party's ability



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**Prime Minister Indira Gandhi**



London News ©

*Indira Gandhi dominates Indian politics. Despite her party's poor showing in several state byelections last year, we judge she remains personally popular as she faces the national election to be held before next February. She has used her position as chairman of the Nonaligned Movement since March 1983 to reinforce her image as a world leader. Besides serving as Prime Minister, Gandhi holds the Atomic Energy, Space, and Science and Technology portfolios in the Cabinet.*

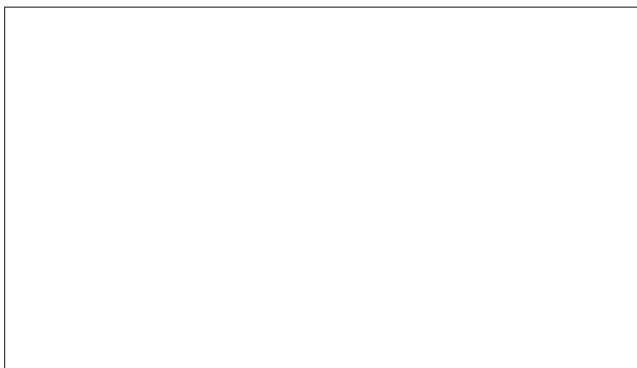
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*Style. According to US diplomats, Gandhi is more a doer than a thinker. Her tendency to respond to the pressure of events or perceived threats to her authority rather than to take the initiative often produces inconsistencies. She has a shrewd instinct for survival and a superb sense of political timing. The US*

*Embassy reports that adversity brings out her combativeness and that she intersperses periods of inactivity with bold moves to catch her opponents by surprise. Although she can be aloof and arrogant, US diplomats have frequently observed her charm and graciousness, especially toward foreign visitors. Gandhi deeply resents personal criticism and has convinced herself and others that her intuitions are infallible and that jealous rivals are conspiring against her.*

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*After 11 years as Prime Minister, Gandhi was soundly defeated in the parliamentary elections in 1977 and spent the next three years fighting court cases for alleged abuses of power. She was expelled from Parliament and briefly imprisoned during this period. She rebuilt her political base, however, and staged a remarkable comeback in the election of January 1980. She viewed her reelection as public approbation of her leadership and integrity, according to US diplomats. Since the death of her elder son Sanjay in 1980, she has groomed her surviving son Rajiv to succeed her.*

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to preempt opposition causes and contributed to the rise of regional parties, according to Indian commentators. To ensure that the party's governing bodies will not again become power bases for political rivals—as they did in the 1960s—Gandhi has eschewed party elections and instead packed the organization at all levels with appointees who owe their status solely to her good graces, according to the same sources. This practice has made the party leadership less

representative, blocked advancement by aspiring young officials, and ruptured the flow of information and support from the grassroots upward through a hierarchy of party units.

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### **The Congress Party—A Profile**

**Genesis.** Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress Party—known as "Congress(I)" for "Indira"—is the result of successive splits in the All India Congress Party founded 100 years ago. The first split occurred in 1969, three years after Gandhi first became prime minister. The organization led by Gandhi—called the "Congress(O)" for "Opposition"—broke away from the old guard Congress politicians, who formed the "Congress(S)" for "Syndicate." [redacted]

Following the victory of the coalition Janata Party in the 1977 national election, the defeated Congress(O) Party again divided as a result of differences over the role of Gandhi and her son Sanjay during the Emergency period (1975-77). Gandhi's Congress(I) organization returned to power in 1980. [redacted]

Hitherto, after each split, Gandhi has successfully consolidated her strength within her party and eventually defeated or co-opted her opponents. [redacted]

**Ideology.** Although formally committed to "democratic socialism," a secular state, and a nonaligned foreign policy, the Congress(I)—like the All India Congress Party before it—has garnered support from a range of religious, caste, and economic groups by avoiding a clear-cut ideological position. Its pragmatic policies—formulated by Gandhi with little internal party debate—are often described as "centrist." [redacted]

**Support Base.** The Congress(I) could until recently count on traditional support inherited from the All India Congress Party among untouchables, Muslims, the urban poor, and landless labor. Voters of the elite Brahmin caste also tended to support the Congress Party. In elections since 1980, however, these groups have demonstrated a willingness to consider other alternatives. [redacted]

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The weakening of the party's organization has shifted the onus for maintaining political stability to the bureaucracy—but we believe this "permanent government" has itself deteriorated, except in New Delhi. The Home Minister recently acknowledged in public that growing corruption is undermining the integrity

and capabilities of the bureaucracy at all levels and gave assurances that New Delhi was taking steps to deal with the problem. Indian commentators, however, have imputed much of the corruption to interference by Congress Party politicians, arbitrary transfers and promotions, and low pay—all conditions caused by New Delhi's policies. In contrast, at the national level Gandhi's mistrust of other politicians has impelled her to bypass her cabinet ministers and deal directly with the highest echelon of the bureaucracy within each ministry, which she has sought to insulate from ministerial interference [redacted] 25X1

We believe Gandhi's concentration of decisionmaking in her own hands has simplified policymaking at the expense of New Delhi's ability to respond effectively to crises. She has assured her preeminence by frequently reshuffling her cabinet and at times directly controlling some key portfolios—such as Defense and Atomic Energy. [redacted] 25X1

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[redacted] Indian political observers note that Gandhi has appointed ineffectual cabinet ministers who rubberstamp her decisions rather than offer up policy options. [redacted] she depends almost exclusively on advice from experienced bureaucrats who pose no political threat to her—notably P. C. Alexander, her Principal Private Secretary, and retired civil servant G. Parthasarathi. According to an authoritative Indian commentator, Gandhi's personal role in managing both domestic and foreign affairs has created bottlenecks in decisionmaking that often preclude preventive actions and create drift in foreign policy. [redacted] 25X1

#### **State Government: The Congress Party's Achilles' Heel**

We believe the moribund condition of Congress Party state units poses the single greatest challenge to Gandhi's claim to provide "government that works." Having broken the hold of state Congress Party bosses who challenged her authority in the 1970s, she has purposely appointed state chief ministers who lack an

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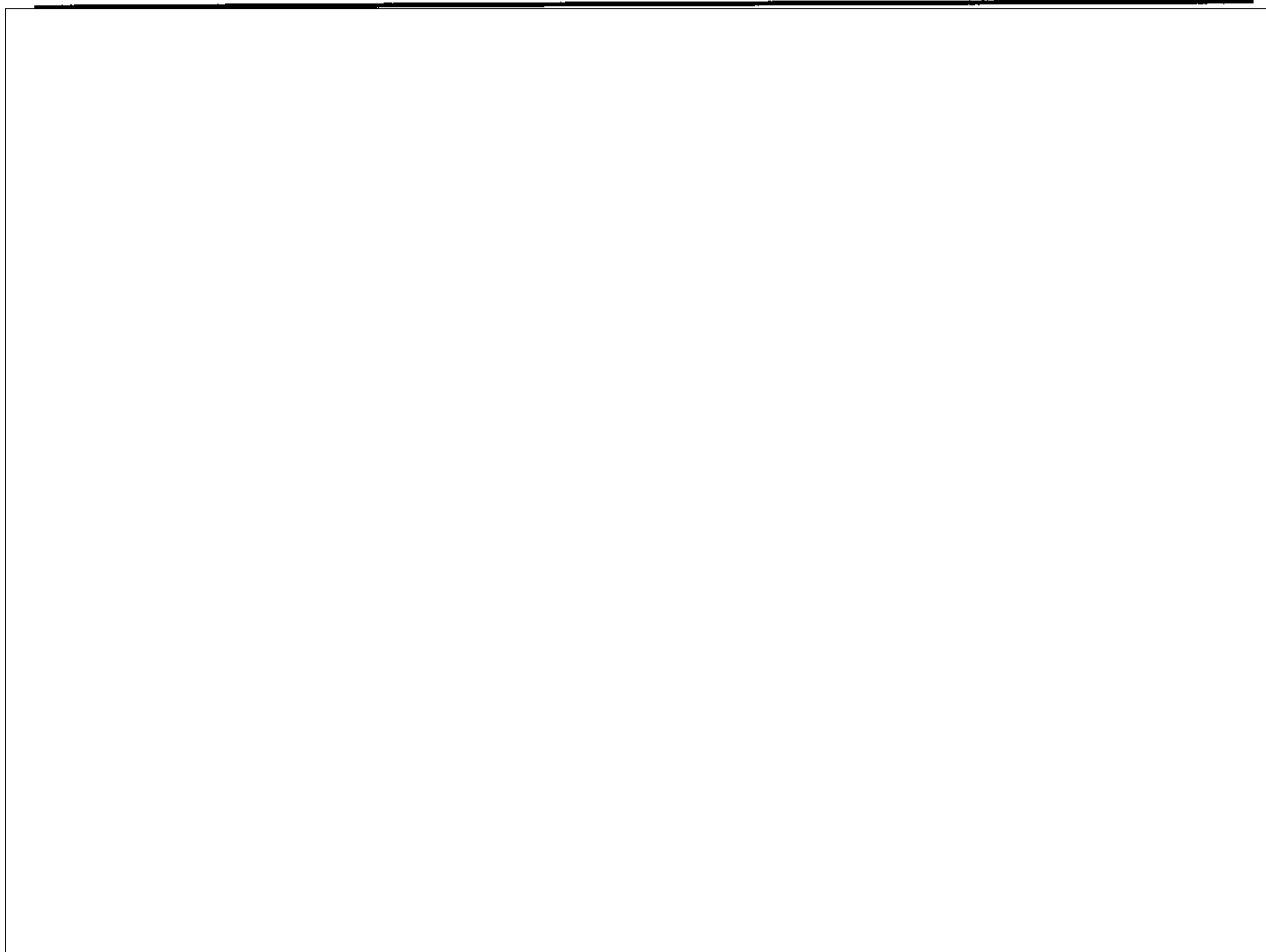
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independent popular base. This practice has fueled factional challenges in the party and reduced its support, according to US academics. In our view, Gandhi has further destabilized Congress-ruled states by interfering frequently to depose chief ministers who have lost her trust. Insecure chief ministers have been unable to deliver on campaign promises, respond effectively to regional concerns, defuse religious and ethnic tensions, or nurture grassroots party organizations. In turn, the perceived weakness of such state governments has encouraged dissidence, [redacted]

We judge that popular disenchantment with corrupt, ineffectual Congress state governments coupled with the emergence of strong opposition challengers in

many states has made the party increasingly vulnerable in elections since 1980. US diplomats have attributed the party's humiliating electoral upsets in two key southern states last year to the poor image and performance of the Congress state governments and the decay of grassroots organizations—a trend also evident in subsequent state and local elections. Candidates have returned to office with diminished support, according to Indian press analysis. At the same time, US scholars note that the emergence in most states of a single opposition party capable of credibly challenging Congress preeminence has meant that Congress can no longer be assured of state victories as a result

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of a divided opposition. Indian media sources note that since 1980, 14 of the 26 Congress candidates who have run for seats in the lower house of Parliament have lost—a trend that in our judgment signals the growing susceptibility of the party's parliamentary majority in the forthcoming national election. [redacted]

In our analysis, the deterioration of Gandhi's party in the states has been a major factor in the erosion of its electoral base among key constituencies. [redacted]

[redacted] the centrist Congress Party has for decades been able to rely on support from the social and economic extremes—notably Muslim, untouchable, and tribal minorities as well as the socially elite Brahmin caste. Recently, however, the perceived failure of Congress state governments to reduce Hindu-Muslim tensions, protect the interests and persons of Muslims and untouchables, and deliver promised benefits to minority groups has contributed to the breakdown of longstanding electoral alliances, according to the US Embassy. Leaders of these groups are also complaining that they are underrepresented in the party's governing bodies, now manned by Gandhi's appointees, according to the Indian media. The loss of Muslim, tribal, untouchable, and Brahmin votes has contributed to Congress Party losses in several recent state and local elections and could pose a threat to national Congress rule in the parliamentary election. [redacted]

**New Delhi's Response**

We believe that Gandhi, while recognizing that her party faces an uphill battle in future elections, remains unwilling to address the problems caused largely by her leadership style. In our view, she is unlikely to relinquish her tight control of party and government until she has secured Rajiv's succession. [redacted]

[redacted] although Gandhi has paid lipservice to party reforms she still gives little weight to party organization, even in the face of growing evidence of its electoral weakness. Gandhi has responded to the party's bad news by repeatedly justifying her strong leadership as a necessary response to growing internal and external threats and discrediting the opposition as an alternative, according to Indian commentators. [redacted]

In our view, Gandhi's highhanded tactics in recent months reflect her recognition that options for recouping the party's losses before the national election are dwindling. Besides accusing opposition parties of every stripe of "antinationalism," Gandhi has also sought to topple opposition-led governments in Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, and Andhra Pradesh through moves that include impugning their legitimacy and bribing their representatives to defect to the Congress Party, according to the Indian press. [redacted]

Gandhi seems to have calculated that what her party may lose in public sympathy by her recent maneuvering it may gain in increased electoral strength if it succeeds. At a minimum, her tacit threat of imposing direct rule from New Delhi on Jammu and Kashmir will, in our judgment, probably prompt regional leaders to soften their public opposition to her. Gandhi will probably seek electoral deals with such regional parties as the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) in Tamil Nadu and the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh to secure additional parliamentary seats in exchange for promises of economic aid or state autonomy. Despite her party's precarious standing, we doubt that Gandhi will resort to reimposing emergency rule to avoid holding elections because she fears that such a move would spark instant opposition unity as it did in 1975. [redacted]

**Prospects for the Congress Party**

We judge that the unity of Gandhi's Congress will be at risk in the short term if it fails to retain a parliamentary majority in the coming national election:

- If the Congress Party lost outright, Gandhi would have to step down, reducing Rajiv's chances of eventual party leadership.
- If the party lost or had to share power, it would probably succumb to factional splits under any leadership.

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**National Elections: Gandhi's Campaign Strategy**

**Issues. Gandhi seeks to:**

- Make national unity and security the major issue, claiming that only her leadership can protect India against the internal and external threats that face it.
- Portray the regionalization of politics as a threat to the nation—not just her party's political tenure.
- Discredit opposition coalition government as an alternative to her rule.
- Claim credit for the economic gains resulting from a favorable monsoon and domestic petroleum production.
- Blame opposition parties for exacerbating adverse developments that they blame on her policies and leadership style, including:
  - Regionalism and secessionism.
  - Caste and religious-based conflict.
  - Declining observance of law and order, particularly in rural areas.
  - Tensions between national and state governments over the division of authority and resource control [redacted]

**Tactics To Undercut the Opposition. Gandhi is trying to:**

- Induce regional parties to form electoral alliances with Congress rather than join opposition coalitions.
- Topple opposition-ruled state governments.

- Lure votes from left-leaning parties by reviving the rhetoric of Indian socialism, without accompanying policy changes.
- Siphon Hindu votes in the crucial Hindi-speaking belt from the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party and Lok Dal, while also underlining Congress's continuing commitment to its longtime Muslim and untouchable supporters. [redacted] 25X1

**Advantages of Incumbency.** According to the Indian press, opposition party leaders fear that Gandhi may try to parlay government prerogatives into electoral advantage for her party by:

- Undertaking to extend television coverage to 75 percent of the country by 1985—presumably before elections. India's government-owned television has consistently served as the mouthpiece of the party in power. 25X1
- Imposing direct rule from New Delhi on the states at election time—possibly by a constitutional amendment to make such rule automatic before all elections, as proposed recently by the Election Commission. Gandhi has imposed "President's Rule" over 40 times in 16 years, often with partisan motives. [redacted] 25X1

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- If Congress returned to power with only a slim majority, party unity would be particularly vulnerable in the event of Gandhi's death,<sup>1</sup> which could spur politicians whom she has forced out of the party to claim the Congress banner under new leadership [redacted]

In our view, the outcome of this election will depend less on Gandhi's popularity than on the ability of the opposition to forge a united front that would present a credible alternative to Congress rule. Analysis of the

[redacted]

1980 election that returned the party to power reveals the extent of its vulnerability to a united opposition. In that election, Congress won 351 of the 525 contested seats in the Lok Sabha—148 with a plurality of the popular vote, not a majority—only because the opposition was weak and divided, according to US academics. Indian analysts project a Congress victory in the coming election—though with a diminished parliamentary majority—only if the party again faces a divided opposition, as it did in 1980. These sources predict that a united front comprising the major

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Wall posters that advertise the national Congress Party meeting held in Calcutta last December feature Gandhi and Rajiv equally.



The Telegraph

opposition parties could secure a parliamentary majority and replace Congress with a coalition government—a judgment with which we agree.

In the longer term, we believe the Congress Party's ability to survive intact and compete successfully for power rests on the willingness of its leaders to restore

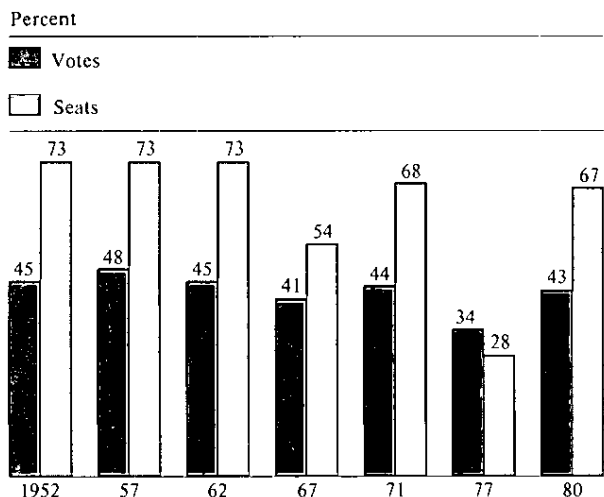
a degree of autonomy and authority to party units at all levels by measures that include:

- Holding party elections.
- Permitting the Congress Working Committee to play its intended role as the party's "parliament."

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**Figure 1**  
**Congress Party Results in Parliamentary Elections, 1952-80**



This graph highlights the advantage accruing to the Congress Party under India's single-representative constituency system—against a fragmented opposition. Congress candidates have been able to capture seats with only a plurality of the vote—hence the disproportionate gain in parliamentary seats from 1977 to 1980, with a gain of only 8.2 percent of the popular vote.

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- Tolerating a measure of disagreement within the party, though not at the cost of organizational discipline.
- Encouraging the election in Congress-ruled states of chief ministers who possess political clout grounded in electoral support.
- Offering incentives for state party officials to revive district and local party organizations not only at election time but between elections as well.

In our view, were Gandhi to institute such changes before installing Rajiv as party leader, she would probably lose the leverage to ensure his succession and would have to face the now-latent resistance of many party members to his promotion at their expense—a price we doubt she would willingly incur. Although we doubt Gandhi would risk challenges to her own authority by relaxing her control, we believe Rajiv or another successor might reverse the party's decay by relinquishing one-person rule.

**India's Principal Opposition Parties**

Party/Leader	Support Base
<b>Parties belonging to National Democratic Alliance</b>	
Lok Dal <sup>a</sup> (Charan Singh)	Greatest strength in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana among small landowners and farmers. Some strong areas in Bihar, Orissa.
Bharatiya Janata Party (A. B. Vajpayee)	Support concentrated among landowners, traders, civil servants in Hindi-belt states—especially Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan.
<b>Parties belonging to United Front</b>	
Janata Party <sup>a</sup> (Chandra Shekhar)	Principally among urban educated voters in Hindi-speaking belt, with pockets of support in Karnataka (whose state government it controls), Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat.
Democratic Socialist Party <sup>a</sup> (H. N. Bahuguna)	Support chiefly confined to pockets of Uttar Pradesh, where Bahuguna was chief minister.
Congress(S) <sup>a</sup> (Sharad Pawar)	Support only in Maharashtra.
Rashtriya Sanjay Manch <sup>a</sup> (Maneka Gandhi)	Limited support in Uttar Pradesh.
<b>Major regional parties</b>	
Telugu Desam (N. T. Rama Rao)	Andhra Pradesh, where it controls state government.
ADMK (M. G. Ramachandran)	Tamil Nadu, where it controls state government. Supported by broad cross section of populace, excluding Brahmins.
DMK (M. Karunanidhi)	Tamil Nadu.
National Conference (Farooq Abdullah)	Chiefly among Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir, where it holds power.
Akali Dal (H. Longowal)	Punjab—among Sikhs.
<b>Communist parties</b>	
Communist Party of India (C. Rajeshwar Rao)	Scattered support nationally.
Communist Party Marxist (E. M. S. Namboodiripad)	Support principally in West Bengal, where it controls state government, with some support in Kerala.

<sup>a</sup> Parties formed by splinters or breakaway factions of the Congress Party—therefore potential rivals for its mantle.

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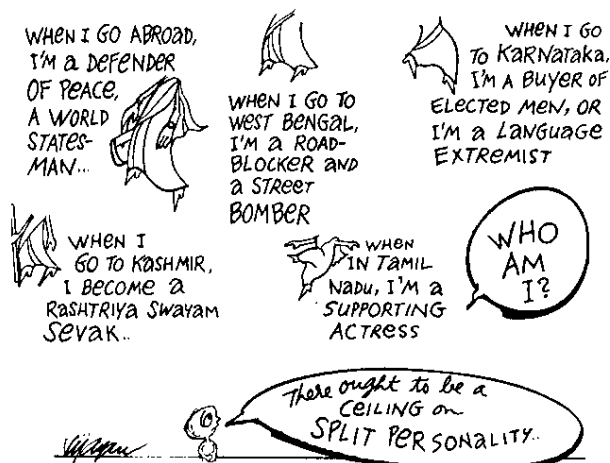


### Foreign Policy Implications

We believe Gandhi's evident determination in recent months to reap electoral benefits from tensions in South Asia has resulted in a tough political posture toward neighboring countries that could adversely affect US interests in the region. According to Embassy sources, Gandhi is seeking to rally domestic support before the national election by appealing for national unity under her leadership in the face of external threats. She has charged Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal as well as the United States with pursuing policies that damage India's security and unity and has asserted New Delhi's right to counter these developments, according to the Indian press. Although sparked by elections, New Delhi's harsh line toward neighboring states in our view has engendered long-term strains that increase the risk of conflict and favor increased Soviet influence in India in the short term.

In our view, Gandhi's recent foreign policy initiatives aim to build support among specific domestic constituencies as well as counter developments that she claims adversely affect Indian interests. Accordingly, she has:

- Unilaterally announced plans to build a wall along the Indo-Bangladeshi border to keep out illegal immigrants. The move probably seeks to placate predominantly Hindu native Assamese who believe competition from the largely Muslim immigrants has reduced their job and educational opportunities.
- Accused Islamabad of fueling Sikh dissidence in Indian Punjab, protested the announced sale by the United States of Harpoon missiles to Pakistan, and stalled negotiations with Pakistan for a nonaggression pact. New Delhi's charges that Pakistan is planning a military offensive against India will probably appeal to conservative Hindu voters, while recent moves to normalize trade, communications, and travel between the two countries will probably please Muslim voters, according to US diplomats.



This cartoon from the English-language Statesman Weekly lampoons Gandhi's versatile political stands as she appeals to diverse constituencies before elections. The "Rashtriya Swayam Sevak" is a Hindu nationalist organization that has increased its following in Jammu and Kashmir with the rise of Muslim chauvinism there.

- Criticized Washington's alleged intentions of obtaining a naval base in Sri Lanka. New Delhi probably calculates that its reaction will help deflect pressure on Gandhi to support Tamils in Sri Lanka as a means of securing Tamil votes in Tamil Nadu—the only southern state she can hope to carry in the national election, according to US consular officials.

In our judgment, although the elections have provided the impetus for Gandhi's tough stance toward neighboring countries, she is genuinely concerned that such developments as Pakistan's growing ability to inflict damage on India and the rumored introduction of foreign bases into South Asia threaten New Delhi's regional dominance and security.

We believe the domestic political pressures and security concerns that are fueling India's new hard line toward its neighbors will also warm Indo-Soviet relations in the near term, at some expense to relations

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with Washington. In our judgment, heightened Indo-Pakistani tensions have reinforced a key element of New Delhi's relationship with Moscow—the shared interest in keeping Pakistan weak and blocking cooperation among the United States, Pakistan, and China. Longstanding Soviet efforts to chill India's relations with these countries through disinformation campaigns are in tune with Gandhi's recent public statements about India's "encirclement" by unfriendly powers associated with the United States. The Soviets will probably try to capitalize on her concerns by pushing for increased exchanges of intelligence and joint measures against Pakistani President Zia, but we judge India's opposition to an increased Soviet presence in South Asia will limit such cooperation.

[redacted]

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Moscow's endorsement of Gandhi's leadership as she faces an increasingly united opposition before elections probably will also favor closer Indo-Soviet ties, at least over the next year. The spate of visits by high-level Soviet officials signals Moscow's desire to bolster Gandhi's political standing, [redacted]

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[redacted] The participation of a Soviet delegation in a plenary meeting of the Congress Party in December 1983—the first such meeting held in eight years—underscores the leftward slide of the party noted by Embassy observers. Indian commentators believe Gandhi will continue her efforts to attract support from leftwing voters but is unlikely to alter her foreign or domestic policy substantially to do so—a judgment with which we concur. [redacted]

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